

## Multicultural Perspectives through Music & Sustainability Education



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Humanity has recently steered itself into an era of environmental instability where the earth is ravaged of its natural resources, where the biodiversity of living organisms is decreasing everyday, and where a rapidly growing human population has become a driving factor in an impending ecological crisis (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2011). Research is increasingly focusing on the roles and responsibilities of public schooling in addressing this crisis (Cassell & Nelson, 2012; Nelson, 2010; Orr, 2004; Stone &

Barlow, 2005). However, explicit discussion on the role of music education is being largely neglected. What are the roles and responsibilities of music educators in addressing the impending ecological crisis? The purpose of this article is to discuss implications for the relationship of music education to education for sustainability within the framework of multicultural education.<sup>1</sup> Bennett Reimer's (2003) synergistic philosophy of music education provides a conceptual lens through which to make this connection in a way that not only keeps to the integrity of music education as a discipline, but also addresses issues in multicultural education.

I will first discuss how the field of multicultural environmental education is making space to address multicultural issues in education for sustainability. I will then

briefly summarize Reimer's synergistic philosophy of music education—specifically his discussion of the feeling dimension of music—and demonstrate how the field of multicultural environmental education is increasingly recognizing the role of emotions in teaching and learning. Utilizing Reimer's philosophy, I will conclude with a discussion of music education in education for sustainability through a multicultural perspective.

### Multicultural Environmental Education

The ecological crisis is being framed as a “cultural crisis” in which people are enculturated to think and live in relationship to the world and the people that surround them (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011, p. 8). Driving this cultural crisis is

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a conflict of values—values of economic and technological salvation rather than ecological responsibility (Callenbach, 2005). Within this is a technology-dependent hope that requires a new way of thinking, what Cassell and Nelson (2010) argue is “a fundamental transformation in support of the development of a new paradigm, a new lens through which the Western mind can adjust its view of society, education and learning, citizenship, and the nature of human habitation on Earth” (p. 183).

Public schools can help our current “value structure evolve toward a more viable long-term approach to systemic global problems” (Edwards, 2005, p. 23). Superficial reforms such as adding an environmental unit or having a once-a-year field trip outdoors are not part of the solution to the problem. Rather, as Nolet (2009) argues, we need a “fundamental change in the educational culture” (p. 418). Educators are now being challenged to think afresh their own roles and responsibilities in preparing students to live in an era of increasing environmental decay (Nelson, 2010).

Stevenson et al. (2013, p. 2) identifies five general characteristics of education for sustainability:

- ◆ It questions ideological norms and assumptions on the nature and purpose(s) of education—in particular the relationship between education and ethics—and views these as fundamental to environmental education (Jickling & Wals, 2013).
- ◆ It embraces a complex, interdisciplinary understanding of the relationships between people, society, and the environment (Edwards, 2005).
- ◆ It is concerned with not only knowledge and values, but also with fostering the means and opportunities for taking action on environmental and sustainability issues (Coss, 2013).
- ◆ Teaching and learning occurs not only in formal institutional settings such as schools and classrooms, but also in informal and public contexts (Sobel, 2004).
- ◆ It embraces both local and global perspectives (Gough, 2013).

A significant focus in education for sustainability is on the recognition of the socio-cultural dimension for addressing the impending ecological crisis. There already exists an empirical (Gaughan, 1996), theoretical (Grass, 1995), and pedagogical (Liao, Larke, & Hill-Jackson, 2011) tradition for addressing these socio-cultural issues through the lens of multicultural education. As defined by Marouli (2002),

multicultural environmental education “highlights the importance of reaching out to culturally diverse populations and of understanding, respecting, and utilizing their perspectives in environmental education” (p. 28; see also Cole, 2007; Grass, 1994, 1995; Peter, 1998).

In her exploratory study of both non-profit and university multicultural environmental education programs in the U.S., Marouli (2002) found in this field the emergence of two theoretical traditions: (1) the environmental justice movement with its recognition and representation of the worldviews of marginalized people

ed in five fundamental aspects of musical experience: feeling (or emotion)<sup>2</sup>; creating; making meaning; cultural and historical context(s); and multiple intelligences. Particularly significant in the intent of this article is a focus on the feeling dimension. He argues for the “emotional dimension of music as being a defining characteristic of it” and is the “basis for its power to heighten, sustain, refine, and extend human emotional life” (p. 73). Music reaches its fullest potential through immersion into this emotional world.

It is because of the traditional Western idea of reason, not emotion, being the

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(e.g., Lewis & James, 1995); and (2) multicultural education that values “cultural pluralism and aims for cross-cultural understanding” (Marouli, 2002, p. 32).

### **Reimer's Feeling Dimension of Music**

Bennett Reimer's (2003) synergistic philosophy of music education provides a philosophical base upon which to discuss how music education addresses multicultural issues in a way that stays true to its uniqueness as an art form. He argues that “every experience of art, whether creating it or sharing it, ‘makes special’ in the way only art can accomplish” (p. 69). The uniqueness of the musical experience, then, lies in its focused engagement with the world of sounds, as opposed to strictly visual, textual, or movement-based experiences. This philosophy is “synergistic” in how it applies a pluralistic stance on historically contested concerns in the philosophy of music—including music as formed sounds, music as practice, music as a means for social change, the boundaries of music and music education, and the relationship between music and utilitarian values. “The central task of music education,” he proposes, “is to make musical experience in all its manifestations as widely available to all people, and as richly cultivated for each individual, as possible” (p. 69).

Reimer's (2003) philosophy is ground-

epitome of human functioning that music has been relegated to extra-curricular status in educational frameworks. However, understandings of the relationship between intellect, intelligence, and emotion have begun to shift (Reimer, 2003, p. 75). We have too long thought of emotion as an unnecessary dimension of conceptualizing intelligence. Rather, “emotions work hand-in-hand with our rational mind,” creating a sort of co-dependent and reciprocal relationship between the two (Robinson, 2011, p. 186). If, then, one dimension of the musical experience is for the enhancement, extension, and deepening of humanity's felt emotional experiences, music education serves to enhance the effectiveness—as well as expand the opportunity—for musical involvement to all individuals.

### **Emotions in Multicultural Environmental Education**

Emotions are of paramount importance in students' reflections on beliefs, norms, values, and assumptions of their own culture, though they have been traditionally omitted from education for sustainability frameworks (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Harré, Armon-Jones, Lutz, & Averill, 1986; Martusewicz, 2001; Zeyer & Kelsey, 2013). Sinha (2010) notes that drawing out discomfiting emotions from students, such as guilt, anger, resentment, fear, or ambivalence flowing from social,

cultural, racial, political, or religious divisions within society, serve as a conduit for students' ability to interpret the world around them and respond to others in more socially aware ways (p. 112). Engagement of emotions in learning contexts not only facilitates student reflection, but is also viewed as a transformative act. "Education of emotions," argues Wang (2008), "is crucial to destabilizing social hierarchies which privilege rationality, logic, control, and, thus, dominance" (p. 11).

Education for sustainability is challenging educators to rethink thinking and learning with a wider conception of intelligence in mind (Cassell & Nelson, 2010; Goleman, 2009; Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012). It is on this legitimization of emotion that Daniel Goleman builds his idea of ecological intelligence. He states that "just as social and emotional intelligence build on the abilities to take other people's perspective, feel with them, and show our concern, ecological intelligence extends this capacity to all natural systems" (Goleman, 2009, p. 44).<sup>3</sup> Emotional intelligence is beginning to be seen as necessary to cultivate the ways of thinking necessary to promote sustainable values and behaviors (Goleman, Barlow, & Bennett, 2010; Michael, 2005).

### Addressing Multicultural Issues through the Feeling Dimension of Music

In what ways are multicultural issues addressed through Reimer's feeling dimension of musical experience? How does addressing these issues fit in an education for sustainability framework? It is first necessary to ring a note of caution against articulating the role of music education in utilitarian terms. Reimer (2003) so timely reminds music educators fighting to keep their practice in schools that:

Advocacy arguments, intended to persuade the larger community to support music programs as part of schooling rather than as an out-of-school activity for those who choose it, have tended to focus on whatever values happen to be important to people at various times, attempting to convince people that music can serve those values and therefore should be allowed a place at the education table. (p. 63)

He mentions several of these utilitarian values: raising test scores, improving spatial-temporal reasoning, making people "smarter," supporting pedagogy in other disciplines, and improving self-discipline

and social skills (p. 63). Justifying music education as such requires valuing it as a means rather than an end. Rather, as Reimer argues, it is for the enhanced engagement in the emotional world of musical sound that music education should be justified.

Turner and Freedman (2004) discuss music as a "tool," that it "builds empathy," and that it serves to "inspire environmental action and advocacy" (p. 45). Allen (2012) argues that ecomusicology contributes to an interdisciplinary approach of "learning about the natural world" and will potentially "bridge disciplines in creative ways to improve students' analytical reasoning and environmental problem-solving skills" (p. 193). Ramsey (2002) discusses a role of music in environmental education as "a tool that can make both teaching and learning more interesting" (p. 195). Though these authors begin to scratch the surface on the role of music education in education for sustainability, the conversation needs to be shifted towards the role of music in the world of emotional experience.

Furthermore, if music education focuses on multicultural issues in education for sustainability, then it needs to do so through the actual emotional experiences of the students. Any discussion on the role(s) of music education should keep the uniqueness of the musical experience at the forefront of teaching and learning. For these reasons I again implore educators to seriously consider the importance of a philosophical base upon which to ground their pedagogy. I agree with Reimer's argument that the engagement into the feeling dimension of music is what compromises that uniqueness of the musical experience.

### Framework for the Education of Feelings

Building on the work of cultural anthropologist Robert Plant Armstrong (1975), Reimer presents a tripartite framework for teaching for the education of feelings:

#### Direct Representation

Reimer's (2003) first principle of teaching for the education of feelings is that the feeling dimension is most fully experienced through "direct engagement with the sounds of music themselves" (p. 95). Aspects of music education such as knowledge of music theory, historical facts, philosophy, and cultural background information are not themselves the desired

end result, but rather a means for more fully engaging in the feeling dimension. It is through actual engagement with the sounds of music itself that awareness of feelings is most authentically felt.

#### Immediation

Reimer's second principle is that music does not serve a "mediating function," as words, numbers, or musical notation symbols do (2003, p. 95). Musical sound is primarily meant to be felt, not to symbolize and portray some idea, message, or belief. Reimer (2003) explains that:

The way music accomplishes its affective presence to us is not, at root, by pointing us to something outside its inherent nature as 'sounds-in-meaningful-configurations,' but by taking us into these sounds directly and thereby into the cultural meanings they have embodied. (p. 95)

#### Witnessing

Reimer's third principle emphasizes the cultural-sharing aspect of the feeling dimension—the reciprocal relationship between maker and hearer. He emphasizes the importance of not only making musical sounds by composers, performers, or improvisors, but also sharing them. "Music," argues Reimer, "is a culture-creating and individual-creating act, and those who witness are key players in its full functioning" (p. 97).

His use of the term "witness" refers to the "inner construction of feeling" that must necessarily occur between the music maker and receiver. Both players have a role. Music educators are to "help reveal to both musicians and listeners more and more of the inherent workings of music so that the possibilities of feeling they contain become more available" (p. 98).

### Challenging Binaries through Music Education

As discussed above, the field of multicultural environmental education legitimizes and recognizes emotions as crucial for engaging and questioning students' own culture as well as essential for building cross-cultural understandings. The very inclusion of music education in educational contexts directly challenges the traditionally-held emotion/reason dichotomy. This duality is being challenged, as Wang (2008) argues:

The dynamics of emotions in multicultural education is an important issue. Such attention, however, does not isolate the role of emotion in pedagogy, but calls for



the unity of intellect and feeling in the classroom to open up a creative dwelling space in which both teachers and students can risk personal and cultural transformation. Such is a vision of sustainable and creative multicultural education. (p.16)

Inclusion and legitimization of emotions through music education challenges the hegemonic epistemology of reason over that of emotion.

### Cross-Cultural Understanding through Music Education

Music affords students the opportunities to place themselves into the lived experiences of cultures distant from their own. Joseph (2012) demonstrates how music serves to “address cultural diversity and build intercultural relations and understandings” when he teaches his Australian students to sing, dance, and play African music (p. 9). He argues that “the teaching and learning of African music allows students to develop and increase their knowledge, skills, and understanding towards each other” (p. 1).

*River of Words* (ROW) is an international K-12 program that invites students to practice place-based learning through an environmental poetry and art contest on the theme of watersheds. “Children,” explains Pamela Michael, cofounder and executive director, “engage the world with their whole selves—conscious and unconscious, emotional and cognitive” (Michael, 2005, p. 111). She further explains:

Our strategy was to create rich sensory experiences for students, encouraging them to explore their communities and imaginations—weaving in natural and cultural history—and to synthesize what they had learned and observed into line and verse.... We tried to add elements of wonder, discovery, interpretation, dexterity, and surprise to learning, and to promote our belief that while not everyone can be an artist, everyone can be artistic. (pp. 113–114)

This program demonstrates Reimer’s description of the purpose of the arts noted earlier—to “make special.” Students can experience through composing, performing, improvising, listening, and many other activities. When we experience a place through rhythm, melody, harmony, and tone colors, we embody that place and the feelings attached to it through music. Music filters our emotional experiencing of a place. This does not have to happen thorough an international competition, either. As Pamela Michael notes in the

statement above, “everyone can be artistic.”

Reiterating Reimer’s philosophy of music education, the central task is to make the experience of music available to “all people” (2003, p. 69). This can be through composing music about the place in which students’ daily lives are situated in, through performing music that reflects the imbedded values and cultural ways of thinking within a particular community, or through developing an appreciation for the variety of musical styles present in a place through listening to music. It is through these activities that students have

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a meaningful experience of place, or as Reimer (2003) states, “what music means, then, is everything a person experiences when involved in it” (p. 165).

In addition, music is increasingly being examined as a “generative force in human development and social bonding” (Shelemay, 2011, p. 381; see also Anshel & Kipper, 1988; Cross, 1999; Hannon & Trehub, 2005; Kreutz, Bongard, Rohmann, Hodapp, & Grebe, 2004; Patel, 2010). For example, the activities of Public Art Workz (Detroit, Michigan) use visual art to challenge the “deep cultural assumptions about why Detroit suffers from poverty, racism, and blight, and the role of violence in the city’s problems” (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011, p. 293).

### Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for a multicultural environmental education perspective on the role of music education in addressing an expanding local and global ecological crisis. In using Reimer’s synergistic philosophy of music education as a foundation, curriculum development in education for sustainability can incorporate music education to address the multicultural issues of the ecological crisis. Emotions are being increasingly recognized as a critical component of multicultural environmental education. It is in the context of emotional experience that music most authentically exists, so relying solely upon auxiliary utilitarian justifications of music education does not keep to the integrity of music education as a discipline. I agree with Reimer (2003) when he states that

“music education attempts to enhance the effectiveness by which people are able to extend their musical involvements” (p. 89). Thus the inclusion and emphasis of music education in the school curriculum challenges the false reason/emotion dichotomy. I have also provided empirical evidence on how the musical experience can and does build cross-cultural understanding.

The most essential problems facing humanity—including the maintaining of a habitable planet for future generations—requires an interdisciplinary way of thinking (Sternberg, 2008). Capra (1999) has already hit the mark in stat-

ing that “the arts can be a powerful tool for...enhancing the emotional dimension that is increasingly being recognized as an essential component of the learning process” (p. 5). In doing so, however, educators must be careful not to capitalize (pun intended) on music for purposes that music is not most authentically suited for. Music education could easily slip right back into the role of the Cinderelian stepchild of schools that music educators have always fought against.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Education for sustainability is by no means a universally understood and uncontended term. Similar terms along this topic include “schooling for sustainability” (Stone, 2010), “sustainability education” (Nolet, 2009), “ecological literacy” (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012; Orr, 1992), “environmental education” (Stevenson, Wals, Dillon, & Brody, 2013; Turner & Freedman, 2004), and even the provocative “pedagogy for survival” (Cassell & Nelson, 2012). While I am in no way attempting to argue that these terms are synonymous, for the purpose of this article I am choosing to use the term education for sustainability.

<sup>2</sup> Reimer (2003) makes a distinction between the terms emotions and feelings. Emotions are a “broad level of awareness,” whereas feelings are “the actual, specific awareness of what is transpiring and its connection with the details of whatever is triggering it” (p. 77). “Feeling carries the generality of an emotional state to the level at which particulars are noticed, processed in awareness, and therefore made conscious” (p. 211). The feeling dimension is the subjective part of emotions—where language ceases to adequately articulate our experiences. It is the role of music to “refine and extend” these emotional experiences into a more felt awareness of our experience” (p. 81).

<sup>3</sup> However, Reimer questions Goleman's (2009) treatment of emotion as a distinct intelligence in stating that "what is dealt with in that book [Emotional Intelligence] is, essentially, emotion rather than feeling. Music and the arts are not mentioned" (Reimer, 2003, p. 212). For a more detailed discussion of this, see Reimer (2003, p. 211-214).

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